

BORED AMERICANS ABROAD

By ANNE O'HARE McCORMICK

FOR the first time since the war Europe begins again to sound like home to the wandering American. Once more he can hail his neighbors in the Haymarket and the Rue Scribe and listen to talk of Ohio politics on the Grand Canal or of New York rents in the Engadine. This summer has witnessed the first return in force of the much-reviled, the long-delayed, the hungrily awaited American tourist. Last Summer the doorways along the beaten track he has tramped so faithfully from Naples to London hung open in a vain and querulous expectation. In the Winter he was lost among the European crowds that filled for a month or two the hotels of the Italian cities and the sunny coasts of the Mediterranean. Various reasons besides the high cost of transportation have kept him mostly on his own side of the ocean since the end of the war. He was weary of Europe; there was a blight on its romance and a blur on its picturesqueness. He had discovered the unparalleled holiday charms of his own continent. He did not hanker for the dangers and discomforts that might beset him on the worn and shaken highways of unsettled lands.

But now he is back. Other reasons have induced him to resume his old-time Summer sport of trawling Europe's past and laughing at its present. I first saw the tourist tide as it trickled into Italy in June, like the first drops of yearned-for rain in a thirsty land. For nearly a year I had been in a Europe curiously empty of almost all Americans except those on business, on duty or in more or less permanent residence. As they began to appear suddenly and in groups upon the streets of Rome, the women, neat and slim, sport-suited, sport-hatted, long-toed and low-heeled, the men rather extinguished and overshadowed by the feminine majority, I had the odd and interesting experience of looking at my countrymen, and particularly my countrywomen, as if I were seeing them for the first time. As they passed across backgrounds so long peopled with other figures I could view them with something like the fresh interest and superficial curiosity of a foreigner.

A recent English visitor to the United States has declared that, while American men have developed a national type, a kind of refined and sharpened reversal to the mold

of the American Indian, the women have not yet evolved any special racial marks or features by which they can be distinguished. It may be true that American women in the mass at home are too diverse to classify into a type, but seen in Europe they are certainly typical enough to be unmistakable anywhere. I have ob-

she is represented by the American tourist abroad. Is almost invariably tall, straight, slender, long-waisted, flat-figured and loose-jointed.

Like the Englishwoman, she is addicted to sport clothes, but, unlike the Englishwoman, she cultivates the curveless lines that set them off and wears them better than the

about, so docile and unvarying a silhouette that you can label the outline a block away. The effect is to make the American woman abroad appear almost as monotonous as she sounds in countries where many voices are as loud but few as level and unmodulated as hers.

The American woman looks less

about, she looks sallow but almost startlingly trig and smart.

But whatever else she looks and wherever one meets her, the first thing that strikes one about the American woman in Europe this year is that she looks bored. My first outside and comparative view of my compatriot discovers her wearing an almost habitual expression of ennui and dissatisfaction. I am aware that it is the penalty of touring to be tired, and a little cross; but is it also the fate of the Summer tourist to be as dull, as languid, as discontented, as so many American travelers seem?

The foreigner's judgment of Americans from their appearance in transit must do them as little justice as mine in my effort to put myself in his place. They are not at their best abroad. No race looks very attractive out of its own country. When one perceives how much more agreeable most people are where they belong, it is evident that there must be something very civilizing and mollifying about the customs one is accustomed to and the home one is at home in. American women in Europe reveal some of their solid worth, but few of the charms and graces they exhibit so generously, sometimes so recklessly, in their native land. The enthusiasm of most foreign visitors for the American woman and their tempered respect for the American man are reversed in Europe, where one learns to discount a somewhat cynical masculine opinion of the American woman both for its ignorance of her real qualities and for its persistence in a more Oriental idea of the feminine sphere than could flourish in a newer civilization. The American woman is nationally called hard and selfish, idle and mannish, cold and flirtatious by European men who know little about her and have far fewer opportunities for comparative study than the Italian peasant girl I met one June morning in Ravenna.

She had unlocked the door that revealed to me the deserted loveliness of one of the most beautiful churches in Italy—that Sant Apollinare in Classe which has stood since the fifth century on the edge of a Pineta whose ancient trees have sung to poets from Dante to Byron. The light in the empty nave itself is like the light that filters through a pine wood; so green and cool and still that the modern world slips away and one can understand what the message means that was written in



"I am bored stiff with this life."

served them during the last few weeks among crowds of Italian, French, English, Belgian and Scandinavian women, and found it impossible not to spot the American at once in the most mixed international gathering. American women not only look American, but they look alike. There is a certain distinctive uniformity in their dress, their figures, even in their features, that I, for one, had never suspected before. Barring a few fat and fussy exceptions, the American woman, as

women of any other race. She is exceedingly trim and tidy. Neatness is almost an American trademark. She insists on hair nets, small hats and no loose ends. Her clothes are simpler and more expensive, but not often so elegant and almost never so feminine as those of the well-dressed women of the Continent. She has more style than distinction, more conformity than individuality. She is the incarnation of the "silhouette" the supreme councils of clothesmakers are always talking

animated, more businesslike, more masculine than the women of the Old World. In Italy, compared to the extremely short-skirted, high-heeled, sex-conscious Italians, she seems staid, sensible, wholesome, almost sexless. In France, in the American modification of the French tailor-made which makes the same model a subtly different garment, she looks much less dressy and feminine than the Frenchwoman. In England, where there are complexions but no clothes worth speaking

imperishable mosaic on the illuminated apse when the church was young.

The world has not slipped away, however, from the young custodian of the historic temple. She lives beside it there in the flat and melancholy fields where once stood the great port of Classis, but she owns a bicycle, the universal vehicle of North Italy, and pedals twice or thrice a week along the five-mile road that leads to the metropolis of Ravenna. And she watches with observant eyes the stragglers from other metropolises who find their way to her door. That morning the world was represented only by a young Swiss architect and myself, and she had time to offer us some of the fruits of her lively observation with the coffee and fresh strawberries she served us after our visit to the church.

"I have learned to know all nationalities by their manner—and their clothes," she informed us. "The Germans always looked the worst and knew the most. In the old days it was often hard to tell the English from the Germans by their looks, but the English talk more, and I like to listen to their voices going up and down the scale. The English men are the best looking, the English women the worst dressed, the French, men and women, always the most ceremonious and elegant. The French are not great travelers like the English, but when they come they know what they travel to see. I like the Americans best. They are generous and friendly. But the Signora will forgive me if I say that they are so quick that I think they must come to say they have seen rather than to see. The women are well and sensibly dressed, but not in the French or Italian fashion, and though they come from a country which is said to be a paradise for women, they often look as if they did not enjoy themselves. I have often wondered why."

I smiled to think of the patronizing tourist thus weighed and measured by an Italian country girl who had never been beyond the forgotten town of Ravenna; but often since, watching from various observation posts that returning tide of American travel that is so largely feminine, I have recalled and shared her perplexity. When I left Italy the stream was still thin, but it was only necessary to cross the border into France to find the American invasion in full progress. It was immediately evident in the longer skirts, longer shoes and longer faces encountered in the mountain resorts and "cures" of Dauphiné and Savoie, and in the prevalence of a language which is becoming more and more stenographic and un-English. There were crowds of Americans at Chamonix and Evian and Aix-les-Bains. They filled the sightseeing automobiles that went to Grenoble and the Grande Chartreuse, to Annecy and Mont Blanc and the Jura Mountains. They were on the fussy Cog railway that panted up Mont Reval and in the boats that churned the glassy blue of the steaming mountain lakes. At Aix-les-Bains their languid interest was divided between two American celebrities, Mary Garden and William Farnum, and the ex-Premier of Greece, who was taking the "cure" and prosecuting his autumnal courtship with equal conscientiousness and candor. Exile as he is from an ungrateful country, M. Venizelos looks the most blooming, care-free and untarnished survivor of those Paris "conversations" that exhausted so many famous men and great reputations. He was probably the only foreigner in Aix who bought American papers daily at the news stand in the square and manifested an alertness to American news and American opinion unusual in Europe even among statesmen.

The Americans who thronged the resorts of Southern France did not look as if they were greatly enjoying themselves. "I'm bored stiff with this life," I overheard one American girl confide to another, and most American faces reflected a similar

state of mind. As I watched my countrywomen drinking the waters in the rather sultry sunshine at Evian and at Aix I wondered whether their really distinguishing air of ennui, restlessness and discontent was due to rheumatism or indigestion, to homesickness or disappointment in Europe's mild amusements, or whether it could be a national expression I had never noticed because I had never before seen it contrasted with the complacent holiday mood of the British, the vivacious enjoyment of the French, the purring ease of the Italians.

All Europeans have certainly more capacity than we for little pleasures. They are easily diverted. Americans yawned over the displays of fireworks proudly provided in the provincial towns of France for the celebration of the Fourteenth of July. They were not, it is true, comparable to the pyrotechnic marvels by which our cities satisfy the patriotic fervor that used to sizzle in the family firecrackers and Roman candles. But the French were delighted with them, just as they are delighted with marionette shows on the sidewalks, with observing the passer-by over a coffee or an aperitif in the cafés, with children's games in the parks. When I arrived in Paris two days after the national holiday, they were still celebrating by dancing and singing in the streets all night, undeterred by the heat of the blistering pavements. Every open-air café in the capital and throughout the country is filled from sunset to midnight by a population which, for the price of a single bock or an ice, gets a whole evening's entertainment, with or without music, out of watching the passing crowds. To the French the human spectacle affords universal, inexpensive and inexhaustible amusement.

On the journey to Paris the American tourist was represented by a group of Rotarians who took possession of the train and made themselves at home. They promptly recognized a brand of heat baleful enough to be of domestic manufacture by removing all their superfluous clothing and parading the corridors in a coatless and collarless search for air and ice water. One was as unobtainable as the other, and the

prowlng Rotarians succeeded only in looking hotter than the tightly-buttoned up and waistcoated Englishman and Frenchman who happened to share my compartment.

At least, however, the American men seemed to be having a good time. They perspired and joked, laughed at each other and at Europe, held international discussions whenever they could find a foreigner who spoke English, pervaded the train with their noise, their restlessness, their sociability and their breezy good humor. The women of the party shared their discomfort but not their high spirits. I lunched opposite a Rotarian and his wife from a big Middle Western city, and the lady gave utterance to the ennui and disillusionment apparent on so many of the faces I had seen. She disapproved of French clothes, French food and French customs. She wanted ice cream. She could not drink mineral water and suffered from a thirst she would not assuage. She had seen nothing in Europe which compensated her for the sacrifice of her front porch and her shower bath at home.

During the afternoon the Rotarians kept drifting sociably into our carriage, engaged in the distinctly American pastime of "jollyng" and telling tall stories. The Englishman could not resist their infectious friendliness. He told stories, too, which the Americans tried valiantly to find funny. He consented, with some surprise, to reveal the price of his kit bag and his walking boots. "They are a good sort, your Rotarians," he conceded, "much more intelligent than English of the same class," and looked pained and puzzled at my uncontrollable mirth. The Frenchman, comprehending neither the jocular seriousness nor the serious joking of the Americans, regarded them with an expression of indulgent bewilderment. He could not quite take in the Rotary idea, and kept informing himself that the American business man was a phenomenon, "tres curieux," "tres naturel," and that the female of the strange species was still more perplexing.

The Rotarians, like all other groups, were swallowed up in a Paris in which one felt the full impact of

the American reoccupation. After a long sojourn in a European Europe, to enter Paris this July was like getting home. The French capital seemed fuller of Americans than New York ever does. They were in possession of the shops, the hotels, the theatres, the restaurants in the Bois. They congested all the railway stations. They looked safe and happy but distressed and irritable as they searched vainly from the perfidious "islands" in the streets for the traffic officer that is not in Paris. In the offices of the American Express Company they stood hundreds deep in five or six queues waiting for mail from home or turning the files of American newspapers. The lifeless air was not lightened by anything fresher in the way of tourist conversation than stock remarks like these: "Yes, I've been to Italy, but don't ask me what I saw. I spent most of my time standing in trains." "I don't see anything very gay about Páree, do you?" "I'm dead now, but I don't suppose I dare go home without seeing another battlefield. Was it Arras or Rheims we saw yesterday, Kenneth?" "Oh, what a pity you missed that! It was the only decent thing on the whole trip."

In Paris, even more than elsewhere, American visitors look weary, listless, disappointed. It is in the nature of all travelers to grumble, but they seem to complain more this year than is their natural habit. They rail against the prices, which are dear only because they expected to find them so cheap. They inveigh against the service, which, while far from what it used to be, is still better than American service. What the traveler once found quaint and picturesque he now finds queer and unprogressive; inconveniences he took for granted before the war now make him peevish and disagreeable.

At Cherbourg I listened to a group of home-going Americans solemnly resolving never to leave the United States again. "What is there over here that we haven't got at home except ruins?" demanded one of them. "And think what we have in New York that you can't get anywhere over here! When I think of the conveniences of my West End

Avenue apartment and the discomforts I've endured everywhere in Europe, I am ready to admit that I am what my husband said I was before I started."

The war has not really changed the quality or variety of Europe's attractions for the tourist. Neither has it made him more captious, critical and hard to please. But it has accustomed him to travel in his own country in greater ease and comfort than he travels abroad, and free from the bewildering, vexations and misunderstandings inevitable to a foreigner in a strange land and multiplied since the war by the complications and delays of passport regulations. We are not, as pilgrims and strangers, as dissatisfied and bored as many American women look in Europe, but we seem just now rather difficult because Europeans have suffered hardships on so universal and overwhelming a scale that the little discomforts that annoy us are the happy accompaniments of normal times to them. When one gets out of the American track one sees at once how much less exigent are other travelers.

All the fault-finding is not on the part of the guests. While the return of the tourist is hailed as a hopeful sign of the return of the world to normal conditions, the European who has no direct interest in the tourist trade is inclined to regard him with hostility and suspicion. He is blamed in France and Italy for the high prices that make life so difficult for the inhabitant. The suggestion of an American business man that in a period of diminished production and depreciated currency France should try to recoup her fortunes by devoting all her energies to cultivating the profitable tourist was received by a French manufacturer with angry resentment. "That would only make life more impossible than it is now for our own people," he said. "The prices would soar even higher and the whole population would be exploited for the benefit of a few. As it is now, most of us can't take a holiday because all the resorts of France are filled with smug foreigners who take advantage of the exchange to enjoy our best at less than half what it would cost a Frenchman for the privilege. Our coasts are so filled with strangers this Summer that many French who are able to take their first vacation since before the war can't find a place to receive them in their own country."

The truth is that neither hospitality nor forbearance is an outstanding national virtue anywhere today. It is not a gracious world. I think some of the vague and unformulated dissatisfaction of the American who comes abroad this year is due to the fact that he finds so much of the visible debris of the war cleared away and so much of its invisible wreckage remaining. It is one thing to read essays about the passing of the ancient order and another thing to go abroad on a pleasure trip and find the ancient order past.

What American travelers have always expected of Europe is something more static, traditional and unchangeable than they have at home. When they discover it in a state of transition more rapid and restless than they have left behind, they feel cheated and abused. The old world is a new world now. The old plumbing, slow trains and unfamiliar food are not matched and mitigated by the old spirit. The old landmarks, old masterpieces and old monuments still remain. Considering the tornado that has swept over it, the beaten track has been marvelously repaired, resurfaced and oiled for the passage of the tourist. France especially has prepared for the reception of the visitor with amazing resourcefulness. But the atmosphere and mood of Europe are changed. What makes its old differences so hard to bear for the itinerant American is that in so many new ways it is becoming like his own country. He might be philosophical about the absence of home comforts, but he cannot endure in silence and equanimity the presence of so many home discomforts.



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